

Holy Cross Wilderness Defense Fund

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White River National Forest Supervisor
900 Grand Avenue
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In Memoriam

30 January 2020

Scott Fitzwilliams
White River Forest Supervisor
900 Grand Avenue
Glenwood Springs, Colorado 81601

Re: Plans for "Whitney Reservoir" within the Homestake Valley

Dear Mr. Fitzwilliams:

Thank you for your informative comments on the proposed Whitney Reservoir in Homestake Valley that have been brought to my attention. I appreciate your expression of concern for the fens and other wetlands that exist in the Homestake Valley that you stated in the Aspen Times article published on July 17 last year. It is obvious, as you stated, that they are results of geologic processes that began over 10,000 years ago with the last Ice Age and that they are irreplaceable. They are collectively a unique ecological treasure that must be protected for the study and enjoyment of all future generations. They have profound intrinsic value quite aside from any human enjoyment. They play vital roles in the preservation of the wilderness ecosystem.

In 1982, I was the organizer and co-founder of the Holy Cross Wilderness Defense Fund. We opposed the Homestake II project planned by Aurora and Colorado Springs, and it has not been built. We continue to oppose this project in any form, and it appears to be unlikely that the Cities can resurrect this destructive project. We totally oppose any project that would modify the boundaries of the Holy Cross Wilderness.

Since 1948, I have camped, fished, and enjoyed the Holy Cross area long before it was designated as a federally protected wilderness, and that includes the Homestake Valley, which was grievously damaged by the construction of the Homestake Reservoir and its Phase I water diversion system.

Enough.

We oppose the issuance of any drilling permit to determine the geologic conditions in anticipation of the proposed Whitney Reservoir. The drilling itself, which you described in the comments I read, is an unacceptably and irreversibly destructive process. It is madness.

We oppose construction of the Whitney Reservoir. It is madness.

The Homestake Valley and surrounding mountains in the Sawatch Range lie at the northern end of the Sawatch Fault. The entire region is seismically active and any dam – including the existing Homestake Reservoir – is a potentially catastrophic, fatal hazard to the downstream communities of Minturn and Red Cliff.

As you and many others know, that's how those mountains got there.

We will make our views known also at the release of a "scoping statement" that seeks public comment on the proposed drilling.

We are ready to take legal action to stop this project when it appears appropriate to do so starting with opposition to the exploratory drilling.

There is no justification for the destruction of the Homestake Valley. My colleague and Vice Chairman of the Holy Cross Wilderness Defense Fund, Professor Jack Holmes, has clearly outlined less destructive alternatives for Aurora and Colorado Springs to obtain the water they need for continued uncontrolled growth including the water rights they hold on water issuing from the Holy Cross Wilderness and Homestake Creek. These alternatives are

widely known, and they are described in Professor Holmes' editorial in the Vail Daily published on August 8, 2019.

There is no compromise possible on the issue of the Whitney Reservoir and its requirement to change the boundaries of the Holy Cross Wilderness. All the compromises have been made, and they have all been to the detriment of the wilderness ecosystem, of which the Homestake Valley is a component. We will use all legal means available to prevent drilling exploration for as well as construction of the proposed Whitney Reservoir. No one should underestimate our determination or effectiveness in this matter.

The opposition to this project among members of the public and especially the environmental community is ferocious. It is an outrage.

This is to say nothing of the madness of transmountain water diversion projects like Homestake I and others that have removed so much water from the Colorado River that it no longer reaches the Gulf of California. The Western Slope of Colorado needs all the water that remains under its immediate control. There is no justification for any further diversions. The Colorado River has been oversubscribed on the basis of outdated, primitive information for most of the last century. John Wesley Powell anticipated and identified this problem before that in the 19th century.

The Colorado River, as are other rivers with headwaters in Colorado, is further threatened by global warming that will accentuate these problems.

If you have any questions that I can answer for you, I am available and at your service. That is especially true for Professor Holmes, who has known and been a resident of the Homestake Valley for decades and is intimately familiar with both the ecological issues and agencies, governmental and otherwise, involved in this matter.

Professor Holmes is an expert on the history and details of this conflict, policy issues and intergovernmental communications since the earliest moments of public policy leading to the current situation such as the purchase of water

rights by Aurora and Colorado Springs and the role of Congress in enabling the conditions leading to construction of the Homestake I project.

We understand that you are in a difficult position as administrator of a federal agency with the responsibility of overseeing a national forest with sensitive ecological features such as the Homestake Valley wetlands while being pressed by governmental entities such as Aurora and Colorado Springs that have zero concern for the protection of these national treasures. We welcome your communication at any time and will work with you in any constructive way possible to resolve these issues.

Sincerely,



Warren M. Hern, M.D., M.P.H., Ph.D.
Chairman, Holy Cross Wilderness Defense Fund

Cc: Hon. Joe Neguse
Hon. Scott Tipton
Hon. Cory Gardner
Hon. Michael Bennet